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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nature and degree of participation by sociologists associated with smaller colleges in the United States in professional sociology organizations. The objective is to encourage these sociologists to become more active in their professional organizations. Professional participation is interpreted to include research production, journal publication, and active membership in state, regional, and national professional groups. Because sociologists from smaller colleges are underrepresented in these ventures, it is often assumed that they are not competent to broaden their role as teachers of sociology to include research and professional participation. Upon examination, however, other reasons for this low-level of participation become evident. These include that sociologists in smaller colleges have allowed their non-participatory role to be defined for them by others, often possess feelings of inferiority which inhibit them from seeking more active participation, may suffer from insufficient professional motivation, and are isolated from professional resources. Four types of isolation are identified--professional, self-imposed, institutional, and organizational. To counteract these obstacles, professional organizations should make serious efforts to increase access to sociologists from smaller colleges. The sociologists, in turn, should utilize every participatory opportunity including giving papers, serving on committees, and interacting personally with association members. (DB)

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SMALLER COLLEGE SOCIOLOGISTS PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Sociologists associated with smaller colleges in the United States long have been subjects of back room gossip as to their professional ability, of suggestive comments, such as "you can do better than that;" and of professional snobbery that equates bigness with quality. As individuals in the typical smaller colleges, they have been relegated to the unofficial status of non-persons--certainly non-professional persons--by many of their professional colleagues and by their own professional organizations.

Typically, these sociologists are underrepresented as active participants in activities sponsored by their professional organizations, such as state, regional, and national meetings and seminars; in the authorship of professional journal articles and books; and in the production of research. Their professional role has been defined <u>for them</u> almost exclusively as that of teachers of sociology courses. A significant element in that statement is that their role has been defined <u>for them by others</u>. Of course, they, too, have contributed to this limited perspective of the role by acquiescing to that image of their role.

It should be obvious that sociologists in all smaller colleges are not subjected to these limitations imposed by their colleges, by their colleagues, or by their professional organizations. However, it is the author's opinion that these sociologists are in an exceptional category

and do not represent the typical situation of the smaller college sociologist in the United States.

The purposes of this paper are to focus attention on the obstacles to active participation in professional organizations that are encountered by sociologists in smaller colleges, the opportunities that are available through their organizations, and selected strategies that can increase their participation level in professional activities. To encourage these sociologists to become more active in their professional organizations in order to benefit from the experiences and to contribute to their organizations is the overriding objective of the presentation.

The first major obstacle to be discussed is that encountered by many sociologists associated with smaller colleges--that of isolation from professional resources that are important to their professional growth and development. The isolation experienced by these sociologists can be interpreted by them as an opportunity as well as an obstacle. For some members of the profession, the isolation associated with a smaller college environment affords them opportunity for greater freedom with which to exercise the option of participating in professional organizations, community groups, or college-related activities. They work in situations in which little pressure is exerted by the administrative staff in support of participation beyond the college or community level. For other sociologists, however, this isolation constitutes a burden which threatens their professional identity. Four types of isolation have been identified by the author that may be experienced by a sociologist in the context of a smaller college: professional isolation, self-imposed isolation, institutional isolation, and organizational isolation.

The first type of isolation to be considered is labeled professional isolation--the isolation of the individual from major sources of professional stimulation and resources for the creation and extension of ideas and theories. For example, this smaller college sociologist experiences little, if any, association with "name sociologists," e.g., a Merton, a Coser, a Leslie, a Bates, A Himes, or a Gomillion. These are names with which he might be familiar; however, he has little opportunity to observe these sociologists as they make great pronouncements or present paper in plenary sessions of regional and national meetings or in special seminars sponsored by professional organizations. Neither does he have the opportunity to sense the humanness of these sociologists as they, too, experience frustration, limitations, and hangups.

This sociologist's isolation is reinforced by the dearth of recognition extended him by "big school" sociologists, i.e., sociologists associated with colleges larger than his own college. It is unusual for him to have easy access to those sociologists who are forging new ideas, proposing theory modifications, and developing research designs. Regardless of the source of this isolation, he typically has little communication with "those people over there." He doesn't pick up the telephone and converse with them about a problem with which he is wrestling at that moment. He doesn't write a letter to one of these professional colleagues seeking advice or a different perspective on his problem. Therefore, his isolation from his sociologists colleagues is reinforced.

A second type of isolation often encountered by the small college sociologist is what the author designates as self-imposed isolation.

This type of isolation is basically concocted by the sociologist as he labels himself as an "outsider in the scheme of things" in his profession. He surmises that he is not part of the "in-group"--not "one of the boys." In essence, he defines his circumstances negatively and then proceeds to conduct himself professionally in a manner which contributes to the fulfillment of that expectation (shades of Merton's self-fulfilling prophecy!).

The frame of mind of being an outsider professionally is not too far removed from the feelings of inferiority--that "they" are better sociologists, better qualified, more productive, more sophisticated, and more "in with the big ones." This self-imposed negative image, thus, becomes the frame of reference for this sociologist, which negatively affect not only his self concept but also the probability of further professional development and achievement. It is logically consistent, consequently, for him to withdraw further from these "others" (who are living symbols of "superiority") as a means of protecting his self image from further erosion. To permit that to occur would be tantamount to admission of inferiority.

To maintain some semblance of competency as a teaching sociologist and to minimize the probability of encountering external references which reinforce this negative self image, he places very low priority on any personal participation in sociological and academic organizations and related activities. Professional meetings and professional journals are interpreted by him as media which reflect high degrees of success and competency of those who do participate--levels of attainment far beyond that which he has accepted for himself.

A third type of isolation contributing to the smaller college

sociologist's circumstances is categorized as institutional isolation, which is isolation generated by fiscal limitations, policies, and priorities prevailing in his college. The past several years have been critical years fiscally particularly for smaller colleges. With astronomically increasing utility expenses and ever increasing inflationary pressures on the economy, institutional budgets have been scrutinized with maniacal precision to identify budgetary areas which can be decreased with a minimum of observable negative affects. Travel funds have become the target of zealous comptrollers, frustrated deans, and steel-nerved presidents as they wrestle with fiscal limitations imposed by their boards of regents, directors, or other benefactors. Therefore, the availability of travel funds with which to defray expenses incurred in attending professional meetings is marginal at best and non-existent at worst. Many smaller college sociologists have to contend with the policy that travel funds for trips to professional meetings are limited for use by those members of the faculty and administration who are presenting research papers. As Southern Sociological Society past-president Tom Ford indicated in The Southern Sociologist, a policy of that nature usually means that those sociologists have little opportunity to present a research paper or any other type of paper by virtue of the Society's bias in programming and leadership combined with institutional priorities (Ford, a., p. 2). In a study of psychology instructors associated with two-year colleges, Nazzaro also indicated that justification for the use of travel funds is a significant problem that is mentioned frequently by his respondents as a partial explanation of their limited participation in professional activities (Nazzaro, p. 556).

Travel for the purpose of participating in meetings and seminars, consequently, becomes an expense which often must be borne entirely or predominantly by the individual's personal meager monetary resources.

This places an additional financial burden on the sociologist who otherwise might be inclined to become involved in his professional organizations. One effect of this financial circumstance is the tendency to discourage him from participating in those meetings. It is much less expensive for him to remain at home and "let the others do that."

The administration of the college through its policies and practices can create an atmosphere that tends to discourage an individual from "leaving his classroom for a joyride at a meeting." This reflection of priorities and biases, not uncommon in the smaller college, can take a direct form--a veto of a request to attend a professional meeting--or a more indirect form, such as requiring the instructor to obtain a substitute to teach his classes during his absence or ridiculing him for "going big time" in his professional interests.

Another contributing factor to institutional isolation is the limited intra-departmental support for professional growth and development. The departmental or divisional chairperson (often who is not a sociologist) conceivably is concerned with the primary responsibilities of insuring that classes are manned and submitting the plethora of reports required by the administration. She may have placed a low priority on her departmental members participation in professional meetings, conducting research, or writing articles for publication. Consequently, little encouragement is given to the sociologist to grow professionally. Too, there is another possibility the chairperson might have to consider. If her instructor continues to develop professionally, he might become more competent than his chairperson, or he might obtain a better position with another college!

Another less common condition contributing to institutional isolation is known as the "lone ranger" syndrome; that is, being the only sociologist on the faculty! This circumstance eventually can affect negatively even

the more enthusiastic and professionally oriented sociologist. One sociologist in a similar situation expressed his feelings candidly: "There is no one to talk with! There is no one here you can sit down with and discuss problems in sociology or the classroom!" Clearly, this feeling of institutional isolation is real--penetrating--haunting--for the sociologist who prefers to become more active in professional activities.

A fourth type of isolation experienced by the smaller college sociologist, which Ford acknowledges in his article "From the President's Desk," is organizational isolation--isolation imposed by the organizational bias of the Southern Sociological Society and other similar organizations. He contends that the organization is

> strongly dominated by the larger universities and pays relatively little attention to the interests of smaller colleges. Nowhere is this more clearly reflected than in the sessions of the annual meetings, the vast majority of which are devoted to research papers (Ford, a., p. 2).

The nature of this type of bias compounds the obstacle of isolation faced by these sociologists. Nazzaro's study of psychology instructors in two-year colleges strongly supported the contention that the instructors' desire to increase their current levels of involvement in their professional organizations (Nazzaro, p. 556). These individuals have ideas to present for consideration by their colleagues in the form of papers, at round table discussions, or in plenary sessions; however, they have relatively little realistic access to those individuals who are the decision-makers (program designers and other individuals in major leadership positions in the organizations). By design or "benign neglect," the interests of these colleagues have been largely ignored in the assignment of program topics, program organizers, and committee membership.

It is as if these sociologists were "step children" to be tolerated as one of those categorical burdens a large organization must support in its struggle for professional excellence.

The more significant factor, however, is not the intention of those manipulators of power--the abominable "they"; instead, it is the negative consequences of their decisions on their colleagues' access to organizational participation. Simply stated, larger colleges monopolize professional organizations and thereby make it extremely difficult for smaller college sociologists to participate in significant numbers in the various activities of the organization.

These four types of isolation--professional, self-imposed, institutional, and organizational--are significant barriers for many smaller college sociologists to active participation in professionally related activities at state, regional, and national levels of operations. In addition, there is another major obstacle to participation by these sociologists--insufficient professional motivation. Insufficient professional motivation to increase or to maintain proficiency through participation in professionally related activities--meetings, seminars, publications, and research--is a reality that must be acknowledged. It should be obvious that the forms of isolation discussed earlier have a negative affect on motivation--a point implicit in that discussion.

A sociologist might react to this negative situation in one of three ways: withdrawal from the situation, pursuit of active participation, or acceptance of spectator status. For the sociologist who lacks self-confidence, withdrawal from the negative situation can be one logical option to exercise in this problem. He refrains from joining or participating even as a spectator in activities related to

professional organizations, action that for him reduces the threat potential of the situation. Conversely, for the sociologist who has a strong need for recognition and achievement, the option of aggressive efforts to "break into the lineup" are not only logical but also crucial to a positive self-image. It is obvious from the participation in this and other sections of the annual meetings of the Southern, the Midsouth, and other comparable organizations, that a number of sociologists from smaller colleges succeed in becoming active participants in professional activities.

There is a third option to be considered in this situation: the sociologist can decide that he prefers his present low-profile posture in the profession. He is basically satisfied with his professional attainments and his working conditions. He demonstrates little interest in participating in, or associating with, sociological colleagues in meetings and seminars. He does not seek the prestige of journal article authorship or ASA or SSS or State recognition. He is comfortable, and he does not wish to become more involved.

Insufficient professional motivation, therefore, becomes a problem--an obstacle--not only to many of the individuals involved but also to other members of the professional groups. Both the professional organization and the individual are interdependent in the goal of professional competency. On the one hand, the professional organization needs the input of sociologists from smaller colleges. On the other hand, the organization's resources can be of value to the growth and development of the sociologist himself. Association with colleagues can be professionally satisfying as well as personally rewarding, a point made by Daniel Schores in a letter to past-president Tom Ford published in

The Southern Sociologist (Ford, b., p. 2). It provides him with the opportunities for exchanging ideas, for exploration of mutual problems, and for further education on topics of particular interest.

Participation in the activities provided by professional organizations should be high in the priorities of professionally oriented sociologists because of its inherent potential for benefits to both individual participants and the profession. The benefits of professional stimulation, of organizational sensitivity to the needs and desires of its members, and of personal social activities cannot be dismissed too easily by serious-minded sociologists.

Opportunities for sociologists from smaller colleges to participate in their professional organizations do exist, although somewhat more limited than is considered to be in the best interest of the profession or its practitioners. The opportunity to increase one's participation, however, can never be ideal for every sociologist in the profession; there always will be limitations or obstacles that can deter one from active participation.

Serious efforts are being made by the leadership of the Southern Sociological Society, as demonstrated by Tom Ford, to increase the access of smaller college sociologists to the organizational structure and to its programs. The consequences of these efforts should become evident to all sociologists who are dissatisfied with their levels of professional participation. Obstacles are being reduced and opportunities for participation are being increased. It then becomes the responsibility of the individual to utilize those opportunities to participate. Presuming that the individual desires to become active in his professional organization (state, regional, or national), the author wishes to suggest

a few strategies that might be employed in that endeavor.

One strategy by which to get a toe-in-the-door is to volunteer for a committee assignment with the organization. One technique that can be used is to contact those persons who are responsible for making committee assignments. Let them know that you are from a small college and that you have found this to be somewhat of a handicap to becoming active in the organization. In making the request, be sure to request an assignment to a specific committee. Merely stating that you would be willing to work on any committee is doomed to failure; it is too indecisive to be taken seriously. In following that approach to greater activity in the organization, it is important to followup the initial contact with a letter in which you reiterate your desire to participate in a particular committee, that you state your pleasure with the earlier communication, and that you exude enthusiasm at the possibility of working with that person. It is basically important to be aggressive in the entire effort to become more active and better known in the organization.

A second strategy suggested by the author is to offer to present a paper at the next meeting of the organization. As soon as the announcements of proposed sessions are made, look for a section in an area of interest to you and write to the section leader and request consideration of your proposed paper. As Ney suggests for authors, make the outline or abstract interesting and different (Ney, p. 593). In preparing the material for consideration, use an unusual title--one that attracts attention and stimulates curiosity. Write the paper in a style that is best for the prospective audience before which the paper will be presented. It might help to telephone the section organizer and discuss your ideas about a paper. Demonstrate in your conversation with that person your own enthusiasm for your topic and your conviction that it is timely and

worthwhile.

A third strategy for participation in professional organizations is to attend the business sessions at the annual meetings. Typically, business sessions are attended by officers of the organization who must present reports or for whom absence would cause personal embarrassment, individuals who have nothing better to do at that time, and other individuals who are genuinely interested in the affairs of the organization. The object of this strategy is to increase visibility in the organization by actively participating in the business meeting (in contrast to merely attending the business meeting) and to provide an opportunity to meet decision-makers of the organization. In terms of participating in the meeting, express your ideas and reactions to points being discussed. Ney again suggests this as one means of expressing legitimate opinions on the topic of discussion as well as a means of drawing attention to you as an individual (Ney, p. 598). This visibility should be of a positive nature--genuine in nature, constructive in intent, and supportive of the purposes of the organization.

In introducing yourself to the officers and other decision-makers in the organization, underscore the fact that you are from a small college. Give them one of your professional cards (which should have your name, college, and address), thus providing another reminder of your introduction. Another aspect of the strategy is to compliment those individuals for something they had accomplished (an article, a speech, etc.) that warrants accolades. The recipient of that praise can deduce that he is being "snowed" or that you are sincere in your expression. In all probability, however, his ego will encourage him in the direction of the latter interpretation of your remarks. This greater visibility can become an effective tool in efforts to increase participation in the

organization of activities.

A fourth strategy to increase the probability of participation in professionally related activities is to develop a working relationship with sociologists from larger colleges and other institutions in the same general geographical area in which the smaller college is located. One way to implement this strategy is to visit the larger college campus and get acquainted with their sociologists. Take the opportunity to discuss several problems that have been of concern and solicit suggestions as to possible corrective action. In effect, use this occasion to create an atmosphere of openness between the two groups of sociologists. Typically, colleagues from the larger colleges are willing to be of assistance provided it is requested. However, it is unrealistic to expect them to volunteer their services, a circumstance that could be construed to be interference in the affairs of a colleague.

Another way in which to implement this strategy is to develop a continuing education project or a research project jointly with colleagues from the larger colleges. Exploration of areas of common interests and commitment usually will reveal potential projects of an appropriate nature that could be submitted for funding. Again, however, it is important to pursue this interest with the other sociologists rather than to await an outreach gesture from them.

There is another strategy for participation that is a major asset to any program by which to increase participation--research. Research attracts attention from colleagues as well as organizations. Although you might not have conducted research since your college days, consider the possibility of designing a simple research project in an area of particular interest. Sharpen your analytical tools and regain research

competency over a period of time. Solicit reactions to your ideas from departmental colleagues and from sociologists from larger colleges. To complete this effort, prepare a paper on your research project and let your professional colleagues know of your work. As indicated in an earlier strategy, submit your paper for publication. If it is rejected by one journal or group, continue to revise the paper and submit it to other groups and journals. Following Ney's advice on publication strategies, don't take "no" for an answer (Ney, p. 599).

The smaller college sociologist is confronted with the obstacles of isolation and insufficient professional motivation in his efforts to become or to remain a competent professional sociologist in his primary role of educator. He is confronted with professional isolation, self-imposed isolation, institutional isolation, and organizational isolation, which compound the difficulty experienced in attempting to become more active in professional organizations. In addition, he must wrestle with the obstacle of insufficient professional motivation--an obstacle that he engineers and that can be a significant deterrent to active organizational participation.

Concurrently, the opportunities for active participation in professional organizations and activities are reflected particularly in the strategies designed to increase one's greater involvement in professional activities. Opportunities for participation do exist or can be created by the sociologist who is motivated sufficiently to take up his own cause.

It is the contention of the author that more sociologists from smaller colleges would participate actively in their professional organizations if they were given encouragement by professional

organizations to become active and if they were offered suggestions or strategies by which to undertake that objective. In the final analysis, however, participation by small college sociologists is determined only in part by the openness of the organization; it is determined primarily by the commitment of that sociologist to his professional growth and development.

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